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S. Side soil tests spurred by toxic drift

By Deborah Nelson

Toxic lead dust has migrated to property across the street from the former Dutch Boy Paints factory, raising concerns that nearby residential areas also may be contaminated, state officials said yesterday.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has ordered immediate soil tests of the Edward White Elementary School, a two-block residential area to the south of the plant and adjacent commercial and light industrial areas.

The order came after the IEPA found high levels of the hazardous metal on vacant lots to the east and northeast of the plant, which once covered a full square block on the corner of 120th and Peoria.

Meanwhile, retesting of rubble on the factory property itself showed dangerous amounts of lead dust despite a \$178,000 emergency cleanup that removed 150 barrels of contaminated material, said IEPA project manager Mary Dinkel. The IEPA yesterday sealed the site indefinitely, barring access and posting a 24-hour guard. Agency officials are discussing the feasibility

of erecting a fence, Dinkel said. "We feel the lead levels are too high to risk having neighbors, children, scavengers on site for now," said the IEPA's Cinda Schien.

Preliminary results of off-site testing have sparked concern that people may be exposed to lead just by walking or living near the plant. Mass testing by the city Health Department earlier this month identified nine people with lead poisoning and more than 300 with elevated lead levels in their blood. Officials do not know whether the lead at Dutch Boy is responsible.

The IEPA expects results by next week from its sampling of soil in residential and business areas around the plant. The samples were taken from an area from 122nd Street and Racine northeast to 119th and Peoria, Dinkel said.

If the results show lead contamination, the IEPA could be faced with the costly job of removing the tainted soil from property other than Dutch Boy. Eventually, the IEPA hopes to be reimbursed by the owners of the factory, which closed in 1980 and is half demolished.